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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: NATIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY ON OPIC PROJECT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The new head of National Housing Authority has assured Post that the title granting 100 acres of land to the National Housing Authority for an OPIC-funded housing project is clear, and that title to the remaining 200 acres should be confirmed shortly. Post has asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy to reconfirm that information and will convey their results separately. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During a December 16 meeting with Econ Chief, the new Managing Director of the National Housing Authority (NHA), Stephen Neufville, confirmed the OPIC-supported housing project by Broadcove is a high priority and the title to the land is clear. (Comment: Neufville took office after an audit of the NHA revealed systemic management problems. He is committed to putting NHA on a sounder footing. End comment.) Neufville said President Sirleaf had refrained from signing new deeds until the proposed Land Commission has had an opportunity to determine a consistent policy. However, given the high priority she attaches to this housing project, she made an exception in this case and convened the Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy (MLME), the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Public Works to ask how a plot could be selected so the NHA could proceed with the OPIC project.

¶3. (SBU) According to Neufville, the GOL's intention to use the land was put out for 30 days public notice, and drew no contesting claims. MLME also confirmed to GOL counterparts that there have been no surveys of the land by private owners, which would be a prerequisite for registering ownership. On those grounds, the GOL is confident it has uncontested title to the land, and the President signed the deed for the first 100 acres. Neufville said the public comment period on the additional 200 acres started November 21, but so far there have been no credible claims and the President should be signing that deed shortly. (Note: Post is working to determine the status of the second deed. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) President Sirleaf raised the Broadcove project in a December 15 meeting with the Ambassador, and reiterated her commitment to moving ahead. Given the history of land disputes in Liberia, Post has also asked the Deputy Minister/Legal Counsellor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Krubo Kollie, and with the Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy, Eugene Shannon, to confirm that ownership of the land is undisputed. Kollie's office has jurisdiction of the land registry, is charged with legal oversight of the validity of deeds; she is having her staff research the deed. Shannon, in a meeting with the Ambassador, January 7, was familiar with the project and said he was not aware of any disputes over the land. We will follow up with working levels at MLME on the status of the deed for the second allocation of land.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: There is tremendous demand in Liberia for already-constructed housing of the type envisioned for this project, and for mortgage financing mechanisms that would make home ownership feasible for low-income but employed Liberians. During our meeting with Neufville at the NHA, we also informed him that OPIC is interested in a range of projects in Liberia, not just the one proposed by Broadcove. Neufville noted there might be possibilities with mortgage or other arrangements with a U.S. affiliated bank or other investors, and said Cellcom (a partially U.S. firm) and the

United Bank for Africa are working to develop a mortgage facility aimed at members of the Diaspora. End comment.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD